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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
AND STATISTICS ARE
AVAILABLE FROM:

- Massachusetts Youth Health Survey, October 2002
www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas
- Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey
www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/yrbs/01/results.pdf
- National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University
www.casacolumbia.org
- Monitoring the Future, Overview of Key Findings 2002
www.monitoringthefuture.org
- Office of National Drug Control Policy
www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov
- Parents. The Anti Drug
www.theantidrug.com
- Partnership for a Drug-Free America
www.drugfreeamerica.org
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.health.org

Be the first to **TALK WITH YOUR PRE-TEEN**
about ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, and other DRUGS

INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

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TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, and OTHER DRUGS

Middle schoolers are facing new challenges. Parents need to find new ways to talk with them about important issues like alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Here are some suggestions that can make it easier:

- Begin bringing up the topic at an early age, when children are most willing to listen.
- If you haven't started talking early, remember that it's never too late to start. Don't be afraid! Your child might feel relieved.
- Be clear that because you love your child, you do not want him or her to use *any* drugs, including alcohol or tobacco. Don't assume your child knows what you expect.
- Be sure your children know what to do if they find themselves around alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Help them practice what they will say. Together, make a plan for what they will do, like calling for a ride home.
- Share information about health risks and legal consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use (see specific drugs). Young people are interested in, and respond to, this kind of information.
- Talk with your child about his or her values and goals, and how they might be affected by drug use.
- Remember that this is not just one conversation. Your child needs you to keep talking *and* listening.

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WHEN ARE THE BEST TIMES TO TALK?

In a recent study, 74% of fourth graders said they wished their parents would talk to them about drugs. Keep that in mind if your child tries to avoid the subject when you bring it up.

► **WHEN AND WHERE TO START TALKING**

- Choose a time when you and your child are both relaxed and in a good mood—perhaps when you're driving in the car, going for a walk together, or after dinner.
- Spend time alone with your child on a regular basis. Use this time to have fun together, strengthen your bond, and provide the chance to talk about important issues.
- Discuss television shows, movies, news articles, or school assignments about alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use.

HOW DO I START?

Finding the first words is sometimes the hardest part. Here are some ways of beginning a conversation—but feel free to use your own words.

- “I realize we haven’t talked about alcohol and other drugs for a while. I love you and want to be sure you’re OK.”
- “I know that most kids your age don’t drink, but I just wanted to check in with you about how important it is that you never drive in a car with someone who’s been using drugs or drinking. Call me anytime if you need a ride.”
- “The person in this movie is addicted to drugs. Why do you think she started using them? What do you think will happen to her? How can she turn her life around?”

HOW CAN I KEEP US TALKING?

Listening can be as powerful as talking. Good listening helps you learn more about your child and builds the bond between you.

- Listen with respect. Take your child’s opinions seriously and you will build his or her sense of responsibility and pride.
- Show you’re listening. Nod or say things like “That’s interesting” or “I didn’t know that.” Provide feedback. Repeat what you heard.
- Be open. Ask questions that help you learn more.
- Say how you feel but use a caring tone. “I am upset that there was alcohol at the party and you didn’t call me.”
- Don’t criticize your child (don’t say “You’re a bad person”), but do point out behavior that must change (“You may not use any alcohol”).
- Know when to let the conversation end—if your child stops listening, if you hear yourself repeating what you already said, or if either of you gets too stressed.
- Come back to the topic—often. “I’ve been thinking about some of the things you said last week when we talked about smoking.”

There are lots of other important ways of keeping in touch, too—a few examples are:

- Ask about current songs or music groups, fashion, TV, movies, fads. Be curious, and respect how much your child knows.

- Ask your child to show or teach you some thing new—like a favorite website or a game.
- Help them practice saying “no” to alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
- Ask children to show you information they get at school about drugs, and review it together.

BIG QUESTIONS

► “DID YOU EVER USE DRUGS?”

Many parents put off talking with their children because they don’t know what to say if asked about their own alcohol or drug use. Many parents can answer “No,” but others need to plan how they will answer this question. Although you might feel uncomfortable, this is a great chance to talk with your child and help him or her learn.

Experts say you should answer honestly. If you do not tell the truth, you risk losing your child’s trust later. How much you want to say may depend on your child’s age. You do not need to give details.

The best approach is to be prepared. Here are some things you might say:

- “We’re talking about you and your life. I want to help make sure you are safe.”
- “We didn’t know then how much drugs can hurt us. Regardless of what I’ve done, as your parent I need to set limits for you.”
- “I wish I’d known that the people who wanted me to try drugs weren’t real friends.”
- “Some of the things that happened to me because of drugs were really scary, and I knew people who died because of them. I want you to benefit from what I learned without having to take the risk.”

► “BUT YOU DRINK (OR SMOKE)...”

- If you drink, do so responsibly. Always provide non-alcoholic drink choices if serving alcohol to other adults. Never ask a child to bring you an alcoholic drink.
- If you smoke, explain that when you began people didn’t know how unhealthy it is and that it’s very hard to stop.
- If you abuse alcohol or other drugs, seek professional help (see “How Can I Learn More?”).